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## Towns along Mississippi River prepare for springtime flooding

Wednesday, March 11, 2009  
By JIM SALTER ~ The Associated Press

ST. LOUIS -- Several communities in Missouri on Tuesday were going through an all-too-common springtime ritual -- preparing to fight back rising rivers.

The Mississippi River is now expected to crest 5 feet to 6 feet above flood stage later this week from southern Iowa through St. Louis, the National Weather Service said Tuesday.

At Cape Girardeau, the river is predicted to crest at 2.5 feet above flood stage March 18. The river will go over flood stage Sunday, when it's expected to rise to 33 feet, one foot over flood stage.

Other rivers like the Grand, Chariton and Fabius are also flooding. And a few spots on the Missouri River are expected to reach flood level, though no significant problems are expected.

The latest round of high water is the result of heavy rain over the weekend in Missouri and to the north, and additional rain Monday and Tuesday. It comes about nine months after the 2008 flood that fell just short of 1993 records at several Mississippi River communities.

Experts don't believe this year's flood will be nearly as serious. The National Weather Service expects little or no rain through the weekend, so the water isn't expected to stay high for long.

Still, flood watchers are preparing as river levels rise rapidly. And there will be inconveniences, especially along the Mississippi -- several roads will close, possibly including short stretches of U.S. 61 in far northeast Missouri and Highway 79 at Louisiana, Mo. Rail lines will be under water and river navigation will be limited. Tens of thousands of acres of farmland will flood.

On the Mississippi, Hannibal and Canton are installing flood gates. Canton placed sandbags atop its levee last year to save the business district. A few sandbags are going up again, mostly to make sure water doesn't seep in through the gates.

The river is expected to reach 6 feet above flood stage later this week, a far cry from 2008's near-record level, but Mayor Joe Clark said the town of 2,500 residents isn't taking any chances.

"Not even close to last year, but it's enough to make us put in the gates," he said.

Flooding at nearby La Grange could close a portion of U.S. 61 and force the closure of a casino parking lot.

Hannibal emergency management director John Hark said the flood, while characterized as moderate, isn't expected to cause significant problems.

"It's just the inconvenience," Hark said. "With the flood gates in, nobody can get to the riverfront. And we'll have a little water backup."

Hark figured the projected crest of 21.6 feet -- 5.6 feet above flood stage -- was nothing he and Mark Twain's hometown can't handle.

"I worked the floods of '73, '93 and 2008, so 21.6 feet -- I hope I don't mess that up," Hark said.

Farther south, Louisiana and Clarksville are also bracing for flooding. Clarksville, a community of 490 residents, has no floodwall and survived the 2008 flood thanks to a

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sandbag wall built around the town's business district. A town official said sandbagging is possible again, but no efforts were underway as of Tuesday.

Winfield is also bracing for flooding. Last year, a burrowing muskrat made the hole that doomed a levee at the town of 1,500 residents, about 50 miles north of St. Louis. The National Guard built a sandbag levee around an enclave of about 100 homes, but it failed, and many of those homes were damaged.

St. Louis expects to see a crest of about a foot-and-a-half above flood stage on Sunday, a level that will have little impact.

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